

Education and 21st Century Talent Development in Utah

To strengthen Utah's economy and maintain its competitive edge, there must be strategic alignment across all state systems involved in developing 21st century workforce talents and skills. The new global market place, national economic pressures, and Utah's unique demographics have defined this as a top priority for businesses, educators, and policy makers alike. In 2007, Governor Jon Huntsman began to explore opportunities to improve the preparation of Utah's workforce, from the importance of early education to the re-training of retirees. His focus resulted in a number of studies or analyses including The Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Assessment, Governor's Early Childhood Commission, and the 21st Century Workforce Initiative. The Governor is working directly with public and private sector partners to put the recommendations from these initiatives into action. Continuing partnership and unified collaboration are essential as Utah continues to prepare its most valuable natural resource, its people, to thrive and prosper in an ultra-competitive global economy.

Skills to Succeed in a Changing World

The world is changing. Educating and preparing Utahns to prosper in the 21st century requires adapting our approach to the change we observe and expect to continue.

The successful Utahan of the 21st century will be one with strong skills in language, mathematics, technology, science, literature, history and the arts. He or she must be comfortable with ideas and abstracts, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, well disciplined, well organized, able to learn very quickly, work well as a member of a team, and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes in the labor market.

Our approach to workforce development must include early childhood education through life and must comprise a partnership among family, community and business to influence and shape each individual's readiness to thrive as a 21st century citizen. Parents must recognize and address the needs of their children for a changing world. Businesses must become active participants in the development and preparation of the workforce. Preparation for post-high school education or training must become the norm, and the standard expectation for our youth. Education and training must produce highly skilled, creative and resourceful individuals who can adapt to rapid changes in society and compete on an international level. What we teach, how we train and what we expect need to remain current and innovative to meet national as well as global demands. We must foster a culture that meets the challenges of the future while building on lessons from the past.

Successes

Several initiatives undertaken from 2006-08 include: Pre K-16 Alliance, Optional Full Day Kindergarten, advancements with teacher compensation, differential compensation for math and science teachers, funding concurrent enrollment, governance of the Utah College of Applied Technology, assessment reform pilots and other advancements for early childhood.

Key Initiatives

The 21st Century Workforce Initiative (find the full report of this initiative [click here](#)) identified several key projects to help Utahns develop the necessary skills and talents for a dynamic, competitive global marketplace. Governor Huntsman is currently meeting regularly with leaders from the Chamber of Commerce, State Board of Education, Office of Public Education, Board of Regents, Utah College of Applied Technology, Department of Workforce Services, and the

Governor's Office of Economic Development to move this initiative forward. The initiative's projects include the following:

- **Leadership.** Establish a framework of interagency collaboration and define roles and responsibilities for creating and implementing a statewide 21st century workforce plan. Recommended approach:
 - Define the charter and membership of a State of Utah Workforce Alliance. This private sector-led organization will have the authority and responsibility to establish a statewide workforce development plan, including identifying the shared objectives, measures and strategic alignment required.
 - Develop a four-year operational plan, including steps to organize and align the efforts of workforce governance partners, including education, business, rehabilitation, training, economic development, workforce council, workforce services and related community activities.
 - Identify resources necessary to implement the plan, including day-to-day responsibilities of the Alliance.
- **Measurement.** Identify, develop, implement and report on 21st century workforce plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Recommended approach:
 - Assemble and organize a group of experts in KPI development to create a KPI template for ongoing measurement of Alliance projects, including criteria to meet federal stimulus-related measurement requirements.
 - Train project workgroups in the development of KPIs for each project area.
 - Develop KPIs to measure progress for each objective in the Alliance's plan.
 - Prepare and report progress on the plan using KPI and ROI metrics.
- **Postsecondary Enrollment.** Develop and implement a statewide plan, based on data gathered from stakeholders, to increase postsecondary education or training. Recommended approach:
 - In partnership with Public and Higher Education, gather data from focus groups or secondary sources and analyze perceived barriers to postsecondary achievement among parents, students and student services administrators.
 - Develop and implement a statewide campaign based on findings of this analysis, with the intended outcome of increasing the number of high school students participating in postsecondary education or training.
 - Continue to strengthen the PreK-16 Alliance assisting students with transitions from high school graduation to post secondary training.
 - Strengthen dual enrollment opportunities for high school students through, Advance Placement, International Baccalaureate, Distance Education and Concurrent Enrollment.
- **Postsecondary Graduation.** Gather data, develop recommendations and promote campaigns to increase students' completion of their postsecondary goals. Recommended approach:
 - Work with Public and Higher Education partners to gather focus group and existing data to determine the root causes for students exiting postsecondary education or training before achieving their goals.

- Work with education specialists from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to explore the impact of church mission participation on college admission and persistence.
- Develop and implement a system-wide postsecondary retention campaign based on the findings of these analyses, with the intended outcome of increasing postsecondary goal achievement and graduation rates.
- **Workforce Development.** Develop and oversee the implementation of a plan to evaluate and address Utah's workforce development needs, including strategies for skill development, curriculum alignment, career pathways and effective counseling.
Recommended approach:
 - Connect education, economic development and workforce development through targeted industry and occupational clusters and clear career pathways that lead to high skill levels necessary for a 21st century workforce. Focus particularly on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skill development.
 - Develop and implement a statewide data collection process to evaluate and align Public and Higher Education curriculum for 21st century workforce needs and skills.
 - Create a matrix that quantifies the extent to which early childhood education, interventions and curriculum adds value in meeting the needs of a 21st century workforce. Address curriculum alignment needs accordingly.
 - Increase the effectiveness of school counseling in support of 21st century workforce development needs. Pursue this objective by achieving appropriate student-to-counselor ratios, more effectively utilizing online services and providing better information to counselors through partnerships across agencies.

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Assessment

The purpose of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Assessment was to minimize assessment and maximize immediate assessment information to students, teachers and parents. Rapid turn around time of computer adaptive testing allows teachers feedback to immediately adapt instruction to the specific needs of the student. Alignment of assessment through postsecondary education assists students with transitions from Pre K-16. The assessments are meant to be both summative and formative, providing information on program information and individual student information.

Next Steps

The establishment of the 21st Century Workforce Initiative, an annual statewide workforce development plan will be the responsibility of a State of Utah Workforce Alliance. This initiative, currently led by Governor Huntsman, will work with industry, the business sector and will include representatives from the public and private sectors. The state workforce development plan will outline specific, time-bounded and measurable actions that will help move Utah toward the goals and objectives outlined in the plan and agreed upon by the alliance.

As it becomes formalized, the State of Utah Workforce Alliance will begin to consider objectives and activities that are currently pursued independently by business, education or other community leaders. Eventually, the alliance will serve as a catalyst for helping to organize and align all statewide strategies, policies and major activities surrounding the development of 21st century workforce talents and skills.